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Chilean Junta Could Retaliate Against Christian Democrats

Chilean Junta President Pinochet's chagrin at the recent pronouncement by the Catholic Church on human rights could lead to retaliation against the Christian Democratic Party, which he blames for the critical tone of the statement.

The party's radio station could be the first to feel the effects of Pinochet's wrath. Thus far the station has refused to heed warnings against political commentaries and has carried extensive excerpts from the Church's declaration.

Relations between the Junta and the Christian Democrats have been sliding downhill. A group of moderate army generals, however, met recently with Christian Democratic leaders and behind-the-scenes efforts to increase the party's role in the government.

Any plans of this nature would be set back severely if the party is punished for the Bishops' declaration. Retaliation against the party would also drive it closer to outright opposition to the regime, which in turn would deprive the Junta of an important potential source of popular support.

The Bishops' declaration, "Reconstruction in Chile," issued on April 24, comes after a period of increasing tension between the Church and the Junta. Pinochet reportedly is angry with Cardinal Raul Silva, the head of the Church in Chile, but still wants to avoid an open break between his regime and the Church.

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